

# Waterville Area 2023 Fishing Outlook

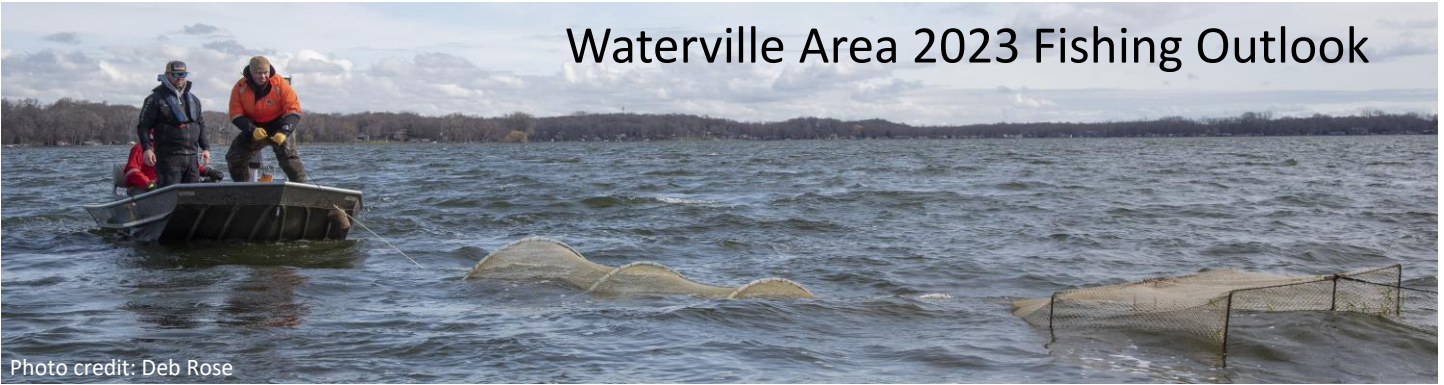


Photo credit: Deb Rose

Lakes managed by Waterville Area Fisheries range from deep, stable lakes to prairie potholes - and provide a true variety of fishing opportunity for anglers. Waterville Fisheries staff follow strategic lake management plans, conducting rotating lake surveys to monitor fish populations in Le Sueur, Blue Earth, Faribault, Waseca, Steele, Dodge, Freeborn, Mower, and Rice counties in southern Minnesota.

The data provided here show a breakdown of fish caught during sampling in 2020, 2021, and 2022 for selected species, by size. We hope you can use this information to decide what to fish for and where in 2023.

The data we present here are from standard surveys conducted with trap nets, gill nets, and electrofishing. They represent a snapshot in time. Use the results shown here as a starting point for your trip and best of luck!

## Bluegill and crappie

Due to COVID-19 workplace safety precautions the figures presented here show trap net data for Bluegill and crappies in 2021 and 2022 only.

Many small lakes in the area hold large numbers of mid-sized Bluegills. Anglers looking for numbers should check out lakes such as St. Olaf or Reeds. Anglers looking for larger fish should head to lakes with lower Bluegill numbers such as Madison, Fountain, or German.

Almost all area lakes offer decent crappie fishing. Pick a lake and give it a go. For larger fish try the Jefferson chain, Loon Lake (Blue Earth County), or Fountain Lake.

## Yellow Perch

Large Yellow Perch are typically associated with large, shallow "Walleye lakes" and can be tough to come by in southern Minnesota. However, some area lakes do offer quality Yellow Perch including German and Sabre. Many lakes managed primarily for Yellow Perch such as Pickeral and Geneva are low due to lack of rain or draw-down. However, Freeborn Lake may provide decent action this winter.

## Walleye

The 2023 Governor's Fishing Opener will be held in Mankato and the timing is excellent. Traditional Mankato area favorites Madison Lake and Lake Washington have healthy Walleye populations. Shallow lakes in the area such as Elysian, Henry, Crystal, and Loon are also booming (barring a winterkill). The 2019 Governor's Fishing Opener host, Fountain Lake, is also a good bet. Walleye anglers in the area have many options.

## Northern Pike

Northern Pike numbers in most lakes are in the range considered desirable by anglers and managers alike. Few lakes in the area suffer from the "hammerhandle" problem common in other parts of the state. Northern Pike over 24 inches can be found at many lakes including Madison, Fountain, and the German/Jefferson Chain.

Waterville area lakes are part of the Southern Zone, which means anglers can only keep two northern pike that must be at least 24 inches long. St. Olaf Lake near New Richland has a 30-inch minimum size limit.

## Largemouth Bass

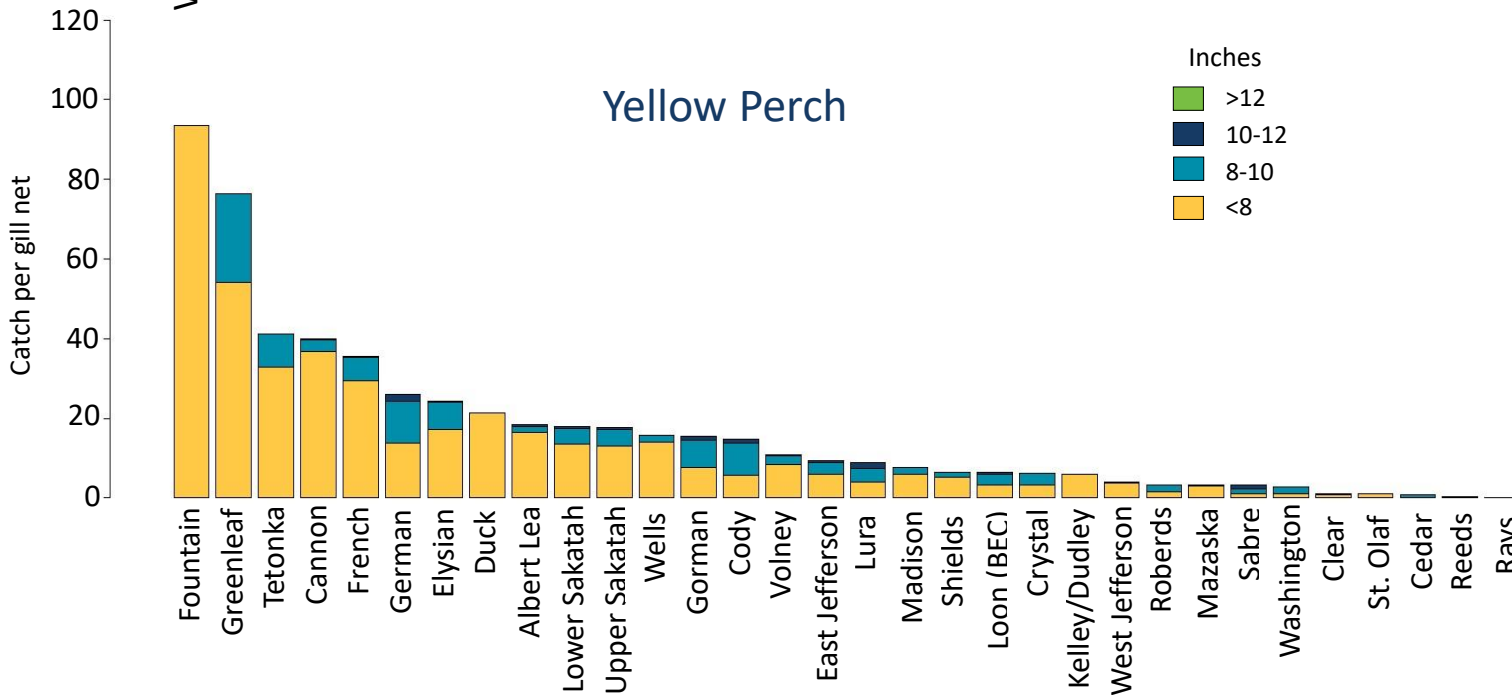
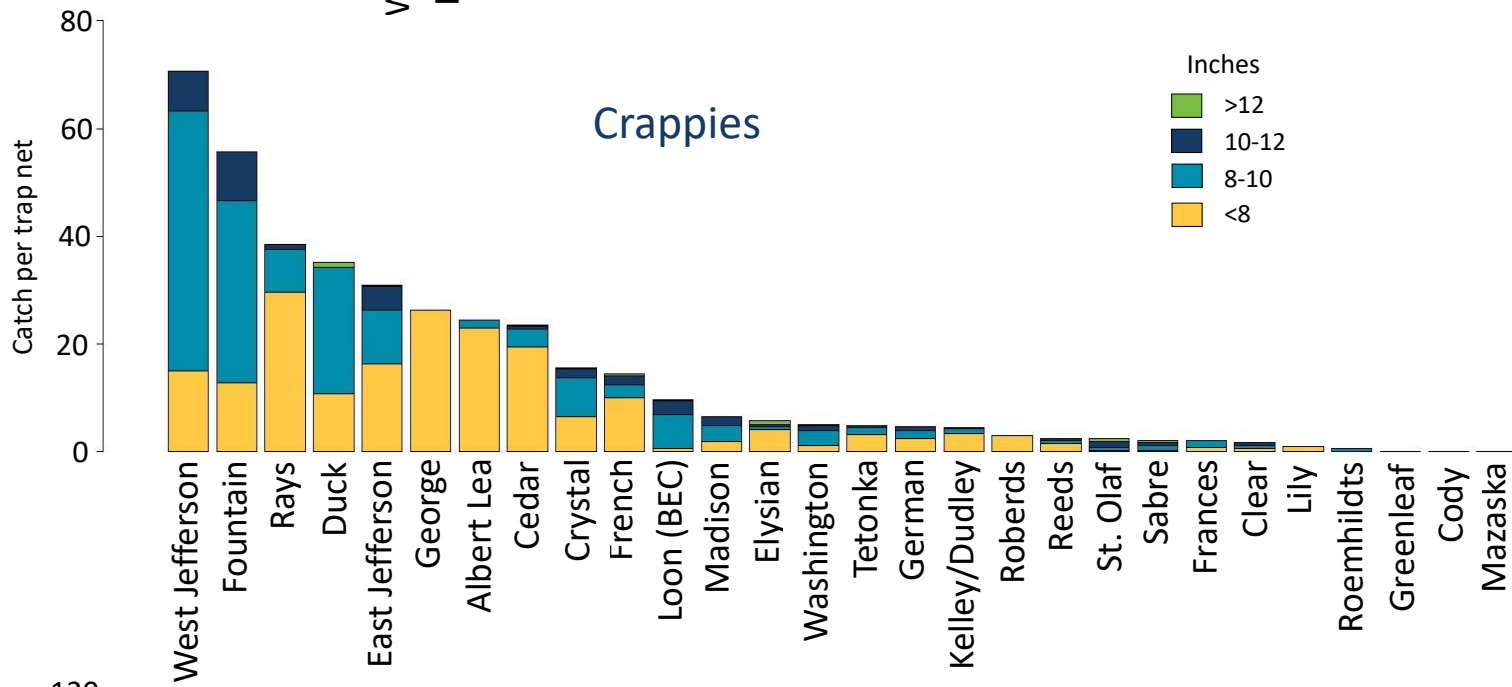
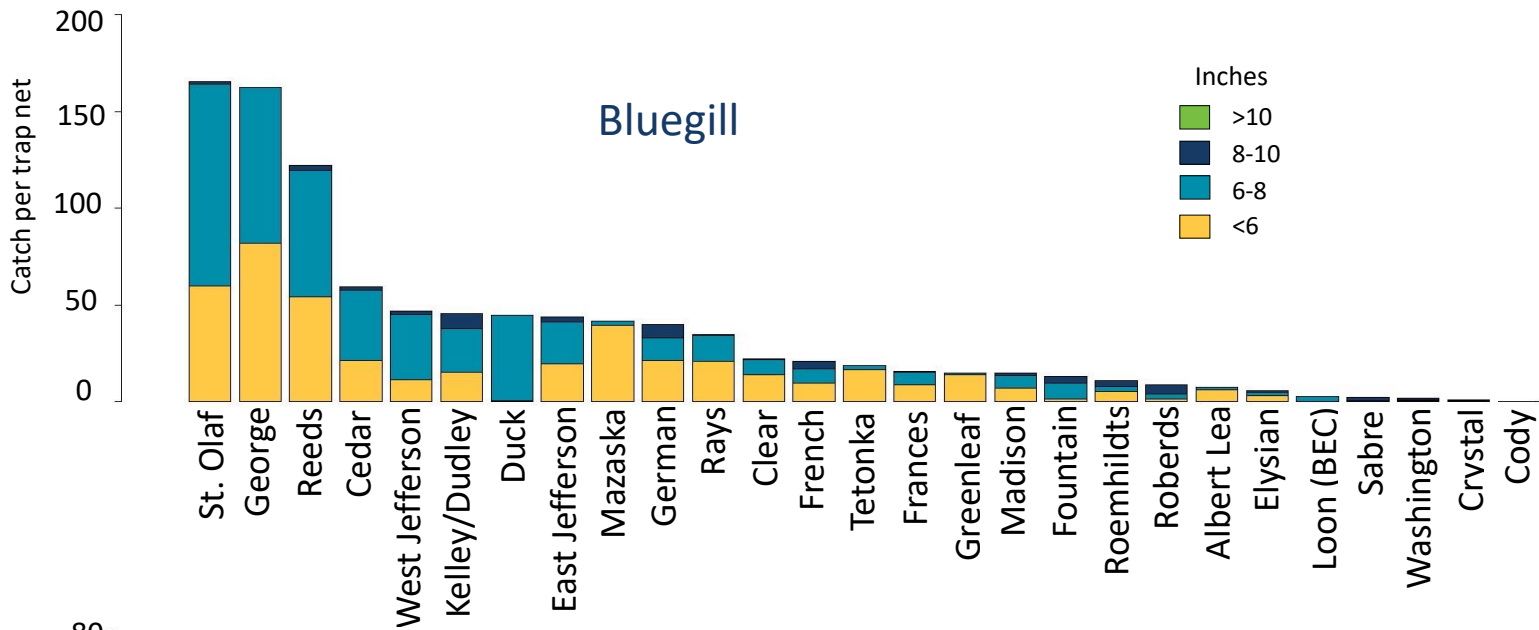
For fast action anglers should check out lakes with high bass numbers such as Lake Frances or Clear Lake in Waseca. Lakes with low to medium densities of bass such as East Jefferson, Cedar, and Fountain often offer the best crack at fish topping the 20-inch mark.

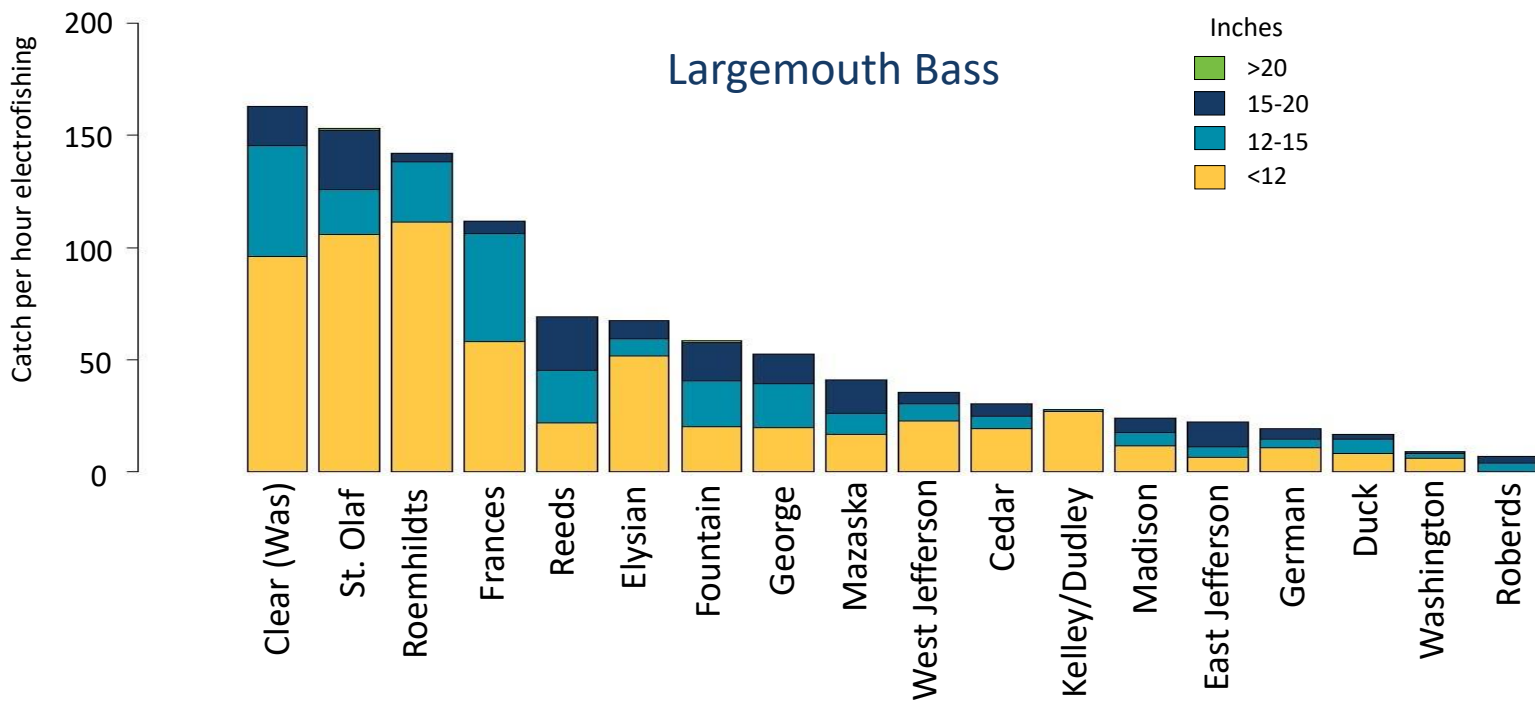
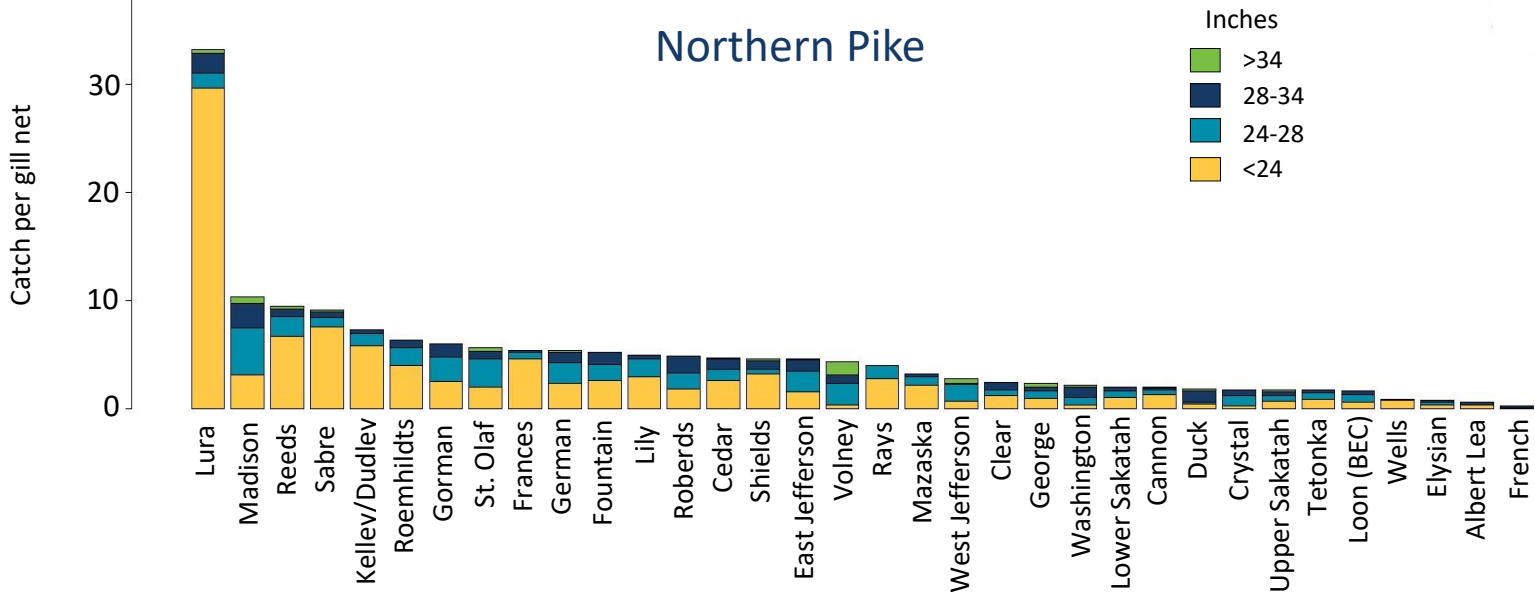
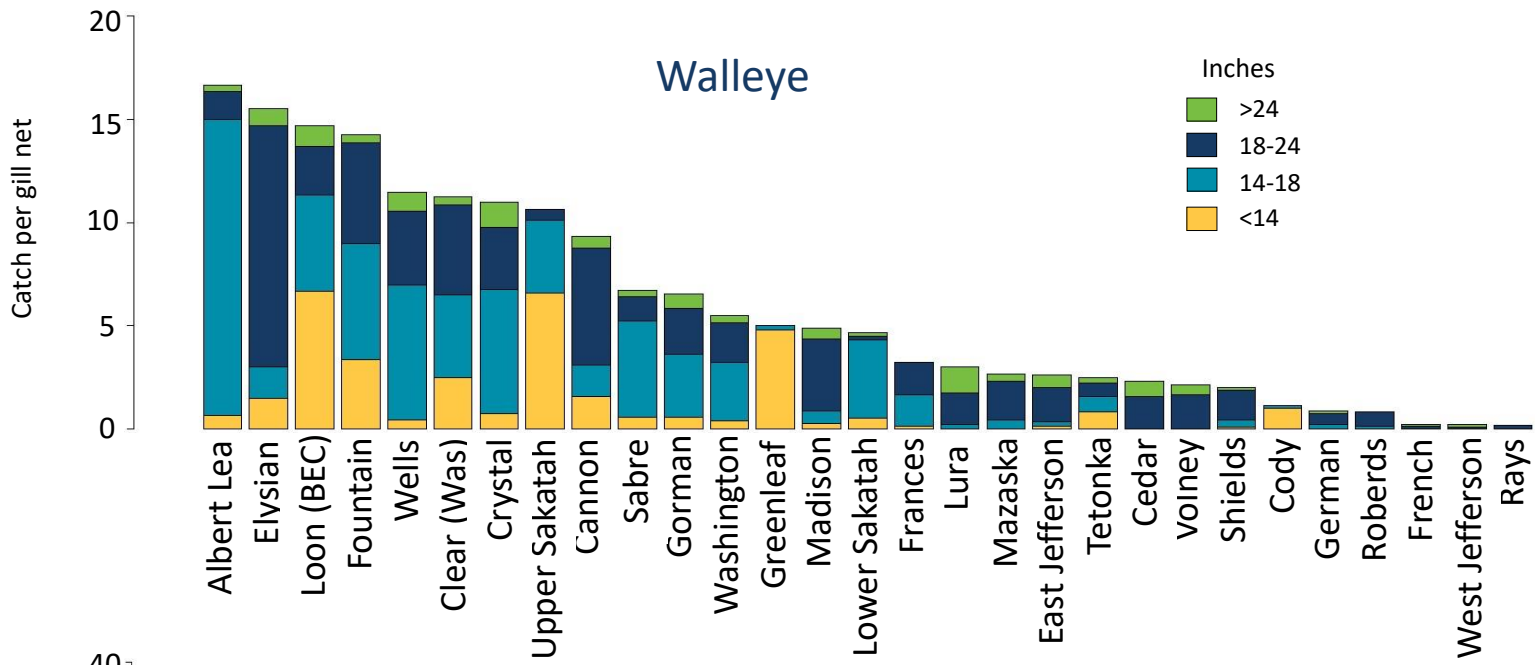
Clear Lake in Waseca has a no kill regulation for Largemouth Bass. All Largemouth Bass must be released.

## Catfish

The Minnesota River is the best bet for Channel Catfish and Flathead Catfish in the Waterville area. The stretch from Cortland to Henderson holds a variety of catfish habitat, especially woody snags. The Le Sueur and Blue Earth rivers are also excellent choices for Channel Catfish. If you prefer to chase Channel Catfish in lakes try Roberds Lake, Lake Tetonka, or Cannon Lake.

*(More species on back page)*





## Bullheads

Bullheads remain a popular target for area anglers. We field many calls each year asking where to go for good bullhead fishing. All Waterville Area lakes have bullheads, the graph at the right shows the lakes with the highest net catches. Most bullheads sampled are Black Bullheads.

## Muskellunge

French Lake, by Faribault, is the only muskie lake in the Waterville area. Recent sampling shows a population of about 200 adult Muskie in the lake, or only 1 fish for every 4 acres of water. There may not be a lot of muskie in French Lake but fish over 40 inches are common and fish over 50 inches are possible.

## Trout

A few options exist for those seeking trout in the Waterville area. Rainbow Trout are stocked every spring at St. Peter AMA and in Wolf Creek in Austin.

Rice Creek, near Dundas, is loaded with small to medium sized brook trout and some large fish. Rice Creek is accessible to anglers via angling an angling easement. To learn more about angling easements and trout fishing in general, see DNR's trout stream webpage

[https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fishing/trout\\_streams/index.html](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fishing/trout_streams/index.html)

## Other Species

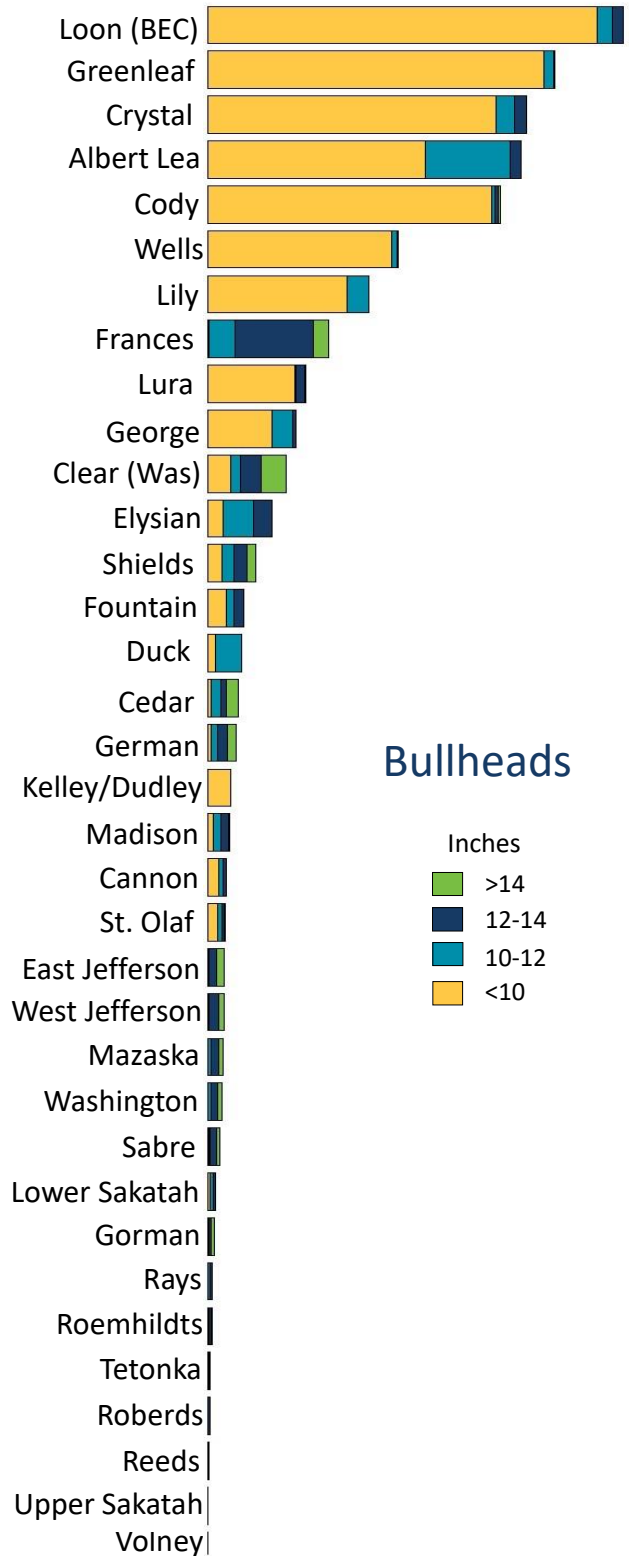
For those seeking something off the beaten track, the Waterville area offers a host of "other" fish. Lakes like German and Mazaska offer Longnose Gar. Mazaska also sports a healthy population of big, hard fighting White Bass. The Minnesota, Le Sueur, and Blue Earth rivers (as well as other, smaller rivers) are a bonanza for anglers looking for less sought-after species like various redhorse, White Suckers, Shovelnose Sturgeon (catch and release only!), and gar. Tetonka Lake, along with the Cannon River, Straight River, and the Minnesota River offer an opportunity to catch a Smallmouth Bass or two. Options are nearly endless for anglers or those looking to arrow a Common Carp.

For more information visit LakeFinder on the MN DNR website.

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/index.html>

Catch per gillnet

0 50 100 150 200 250 300



## Bullheads

Inches

- >14
- 12-14
- 10-12
- <10